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Viewing cable 07TELAVIV867, ISRAELI TRANSPORTATION MINISTER MOFAZ ON IRAN AND

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07TELAVIV867	2007-03-21 06:14	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Tel Aviv

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI TRANSPORTATION MINISTER MOFAZ ON IRAN AND
NORTH KOREA, LEBANON AND SYRIA, AND THE PALESTINIANS

REF: TEL AVIV 831

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones. Reasons: 1.4 (b)(d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) During a March 14 meeting devoted to a variety of issues, Israeli Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz praised the latest session of the U.S.-Israel Strategic Dialogue, and noted that he would soon begin preparing for the next session scheduled for May 7-8 in Washington. Mofaz, who has the GOI lead on the Strategic Dialogue, said he hopes to meet with Under Secretary Burns when he visits Israel the second half of April. Mofaz asked about U.S. thinking on the way ahead on Iran's nuclear program, and said that he will likely discuss Iran during his visit to China the week of March 18. Mofaz considered the agreement with North Korea on its nuclear program encouraging, and expressed his hope that Iran is watching and will realize the benefits of renouncing its own nuclear program. Mofaz urged that more work be done by the international community to address gaps in UNSCR 1701 implementation that are allowing Hizballah to rebuild its capabilities in Lebanon. He expressed skepticism that a Palestinian National Unity Government will accept the Quartet principles, and lamented that Iran's role in Palestinian affairs has dramatically increased since 2002. Nevertheless, Mofaz agreed that it is in Israel's interest to keep the Karni crossing open as much as possible, and noted his understanding that payment problems that caused recent Palestinian strikes, which closed the crossing, had been resolved. Reftel addresses Mofaz's comments about negotiating an Open Skies agreement. END SUMMARY.

U.S. - ISRAEL STRATEGIC DIALOGUE AND ASSISTANCE TALKS

¶2. (S) Mofaz, who led the Israeli side in the January 2007 session of the U.S. - Israel Strategic Dialogue, characterized the session as a very good one and said that he would begin preparing for the next session (to be held in Washington May 7-8) in the coming weeks. He asked about the Ambassador's participation in recent U.S.-Israel discussions on the future of U.S. assistance to Israel -- specifically whether the U.S. has plans to increase its support for Israel's defense. The Ambassador replied that discussions focused mainly on the Israeli economy and its relationship to Israel's security needs, and noted that specific assistance requests were not discussed. The Ambassador noted that it might be wise to link future defense assistance to other policies, such as U.S. loan guarantees to Israel had been. The Ambassador emphasized that the U.S. loan guarantee program to Israel has been very successful in maintaining sound fiscal policies even when governments change. Ambassador Jones stressed that the discussions with the Israeli side were positive, and that the U.S. side reiterated America's strong commitment to Israel's security.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador noted that Under Secretary Burns is planning to visit Israel during the second half of April. Mofaz said that he will want to meet with the Under Secretary

while he is in Israel to consult on the agenda for the next Strategic Dialogue.

IRAN: MOFAZ LIKELY TO DISCUSS IT IN CHINA

14. (S) Mofaz said Iran was the main issue during the last round of the Strategic Dialogue, and expressed his understanding that U.S. policy is to implement tougher sanctions against Iran, and pursue a second UNSC resolution. He wondered if a second resolution would widen the sanctions called for in UNSCR 1737, or call on UN member states to implement unilateral sanctions against Iran. The Ambassador clarified the U.S. is looking at additional sanctions under a UNSC resolution, and is also encouraging partners to apply unilateral sanctions against Iran. He noted the Under Secretary's recent discussions with the P-5 1 Political

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Directors, and U.S. efforts to get the Germans to stop providing export credits to companies doing business with Iran.

15. (S) The Ambassador noted Under Secretary Joseph and Assistant Secretary Rood's recent visit to Israel and their discussions with a GOI interagency team on nonproliferation

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and arms control issues. He stressed that their talks followed-up on many of the issues that were considered during the Strategic Dialogue. Mofaz said that he believes that financial sanctions against Iran are working. The Ambassador confirmed this, observing that UNSCR 1737 sent a message to the international business community that doing business with Iran could become increasingly risky.

16. (S) Mofaz asked about China's current position on Iran, noting that he would be in China the week of March 18 to discuss transportation issues with Chinese officials. He said he will spend four days in China, and added that he was responding to an invitation issued to him while he was Defense Minister. Mofaz said that he will meet with the head of a parliamentary committee that deals with Iran, and so will likely end up discussing Iran while he is there. The Ambassador observed that if the Chinese want to preclude the U.S. from taking more energetic action in Iran -- as their public posture suggests -- it would be in their interest to be more cooperative with the U.S. diplomatically.

NORTH KOREA: MOFAZ HOPES IRAN IS WATCHING

17. (S) Mofaz asked about the latest agreement with North Korea. The Ambassador noted that bilateral talks had been held with the North Koreans, and that the dialogue appeared to be proceeding well. He stressed that the U.S. is committed to dismantling North Korea's nuclear reactor, news which Mofaz welcomed. The Ambassador added that part of the strategy is to convince the North Koreans that the U.S. has no hostile intent, and that North Korea could ultimately benefit from renouncing its nuclear program. Mofaz said that he hoped that Iran is watching the situation closely and will decide to follow suit.

LEBANON AND SYRIA: MOFAZ URGES MORE TO BE DONE

18. (S) Turning to Lebanon, Syria and UNSCR 1701, Mofaz claimed that there is no effective embargo on arms going into Lebanon, and that Syria has moved long-range rockets into Lebanon. He complained that Hizballah has not been "dismantled," that neither the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) nor UNIFIL have tried to enter areas that are currently controlled by Hizballah, and that no timetable for the return

of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers has emerged. Mofaz said that he told Secretary Rice and Under Secretary Burns during his visit to Washington in September that Hizballah will spare no effort to topple the Siniora government in Lebanon. He pointed to Hizballah's activities over the past few months as evidence of this effort, and warned that it will continue. Mofaz urged that more pressure be applied to Syria, Iran and Hizballah, and cautioned that the international community will not keep its forces deployed in southern Lebanon for 5-6 more years: "Hostilities will start up again one day. It is just a matter of time." Mofaz said that as Deputy Prime Minister, he is privy to daily intelligence reports, and that he is seeing increasing indications that Al Qaeda and the Islamic Jihad are active in Lebanon.

19. (S) The Ambassador noted that the U.S. wants to provide military equipment to the LAF, and that equipment lists have been provided to the Israeli Prime Minister's Office and the MOD for review. He said that the list includes encrypted radios, night-vision goggles (NVGs), and anti-tank weapons that are less capable than those already possessed by the LAF. The Ambassador urged that Israel agree to allow this equipment to be turned over to the LAF. Regarding NVGs, Ambassador Jones stressed that a recent audit determined that all NVGs previously supplied to the LAF had been accounted for. He added, "We are confident that the LAF will honor our restrictions on our equipment, and that we can address any concerns you may have about specific equipment items." The Ambassador stressed that the USG wants to strengthen the GOL's capabilities so that it can stand up to Hizballah and other militias. Mofaz cautioned that, according to Israel's information, at least fifty percent of the LAF are Shia. He warned that this could make it difficult for the LAF to confront Hizballah.

10. (S) The Ambassador noted that Israeli Defense Intelligence Research Division Chief BGEN Yossi Baidatz's recent briefings at the UN on Israel's perspective of the situation in Lebanon were very well received and will help member states to recognize that arms smuggling continues and

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the situation along the Syrian-Lebanese border remains problematic. The Ambassador stressed that it would be useful and greatly appreciated if Baidatz could make the same presentation to the Germans, as it would demonstrate that they need to do more on border security. Mofaz said that he is convinced that such information sharing is very helpful, and that what is needed is to build "common understanding" of a problem. Mofaz noted that IDF Planning Division Chief Ido Nehustan had been in France a month earlier and had shared the same information with the French, although not in as great detail.

MOFAZ DOUBTS PALESTINIAN NUG WILL ACCEPT QUARTET PRINCIPLES

11. (S) Mofaz noted his skepticism that any Palestinian National Unity Government (NUG) would accept the Quartet principles and move in directions that Israel wants. He added that he cannot imagine that Fatah and Hamas will agree to work with each other -- even over the long run: "Hamas is much stronger than Fatah in Gaza. They hope to gain power in the future. I do not see Abu Mazen taking control of Hamas. Khaled Meshal has incredible power, and he is getting direction from Iran." Characterizing the last ten years as a "lost decade" in the Palestinian Authority (PA), Mofaz complained that Abu Mazen suffers from a weak personality, while influence from the outside is increasing. He observed that eight years ago, Iran had no influence in the PA, while now, its influence is significant. Mofaz recalled that Iran's role was revealed when the IDF seized the Karine A in January 2002, and found it loaded with Iranian weapons destined for the PA.

12. (S) The Ambassador stressed that the U.S. is fully

committed to the Quartet principles, and is withholding judgment on the NUG until it is formed. He stressed that solving the Israel-Palestinian crisis sooner rather than later would be in Israel's interests, especially as its own intelligence suggests that Hamas is urgently seeking weapons systems of the kind that Hizballah is receiving, and is sending its operatives to Iran for training. The Ambassador observed that the Saudi Initiative may be a way to expand the peace camp in the region and bring moderate Arabs around to support peace with Israel. Mofaz expressed concern that there appears to be nobody in Fatah who could serve as a leader of the PA after Abu Mazen. The Ambassador noted that Secretary Rice would be in Israel shortly and press for

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progress on peace.

MOFAZ IN FAVOR OF KEEPING KARNI CROSSING OPEN

¶13. (S) On the Karni crossing, Mofaz said that his ministry's only role is to provide funding for the workers in order to extend the crossing hours as promised by PM Olmert, and that he is in favor of keeping open the crossing at night. He said that agreement had recently been reached that extended hours would start in mid-April. He added that the number of cargo trucks passing through the crossing in both directions had steadily increased in recent months. The Ambassador agreed, noting that the USG was closely monitoring the truck flow. He stressed that unemployment that results from shutting down the Karni crossing only helps Hamas in Gaza. Mofaz agreed.

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